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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 002684

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/RPM EVA SHINAGEL, USNATO FOR PETER CHISHOLM,  
DOD/OSD FOR DAVID DES ROCHES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/24/2016

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SUBJECT: FRANCE SUPPORTS WITH RESERVATIONS NATO'S MIDDLE  
EAST SECURITY COOPERATION CENTER

REF: STATE 63202

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Bruce Turner, Reason 1.4 B/D

**¶1.** (C) Summary: On April 24, French MFA officials stated that France supported the establishment of NATO's Middle East Security Cooperation Center (SCC) in principle, although they have serious concerns that it not draw resources away from existing NATO operations/programs, and believe that the program content should stay focused on NATO's military competencies. France is also keen that the SCC have a minimal footprint in the region. France supports Germany's incremental approach of calling on existing NATO schools and PfP training centers, and using mobile training teams, in the run-up to the Riga summit. The suggestion was also made by the GOF that NATO consider making the SCC available to other institutions, such as OSCE, the EU, or the UN. The GOF cautioned, however, that France was not supportive of NATO links with African training centers at this time, arguing that France and other Europeans are already engaged on regional programs, such as the French RECAMP initiative, and that there was no need for duplication. End summary.

**¶2.** (C) Poloff raised with Nicolas Niemtchinow, MFA DAS-equivalent Director for NATO, reftel points on support for the Middle East Security Cooperation Center (SCC). Niemtchinow said France supported the SCC as a summit deliverable, as well as the German incremental approach that NATO draw on existing NATO schools and PfP training centers, while also deploying mobile training teams, in the interim.

**¶3.** (C) Niemtchinow said that he had raised the SCC with MFA decision-makers following his earlier discussions with EUR PDAS Volker in Washington, and that the reaction had been generally positive. France looked forward to further discussions on setting up the SCC. At the same time, France believed it was important that the SCC's aims and development be "realistic." When pressed for details, Niemtchinow said further discussions were necessary in order to discuss the following concerns:

-- The SCC should not draw resources away from existing NATO programs and operations, hence its funding mechanism would be key;

-- The SCC's local "footprint" should be kept discreet by ensuring that host nations retain ownership of the centers -- it was important to avoid a heavy NATO presence, which would also add to security concerns and costs;

-- NATO might want to consider expanding and internationalizing the SCC by opening up its training facilities for the use of other international organizations, such as the OSCE, the EU or the UN, in their respective fields of competency;

-- Lastly, it was important that the SCC's program content accurately reflect NATO's strengths. Looking at our non-paper, Niemtchinow said defense planning, budgeting, and multi-national peace operations were most appropriate. However, several countries, including France, preferred to conduct other programs, such as counter-terrorism training, bilaterally.

**¶4.** (C) In response to poloff's queries, Niemtchinow said that France might consider sending trainers, but likely would not send French students to the SCC, as the French military already participated in several bilateral programs in the region, which focused on language and area studies. He also cautioned that host governments and NATO would have to discuss how to deal with the personal security of NATO trainers, as well as who would bear responsibility for these security expenditures.

**¶5.** (C) Niemtchinow said that France was less keen on supporting the establishment of formal training links between NATO and appropriate African training centers, at least until after the Riga summit. French aims for the region remained reinforcing local ownership of issues by strengthening African capacities, including those of the African Union, to manage regional crises. A secondary consideration, according to Niemtchinow, was that several European countries, such as

the UK and France, as well as the EU, already were at work on projects in the region. France, for instance, has been pursuing the RECAMP program with the British and would not wish to transfer resources to a NATO program, given its 15-year investment in RECAMP.

¶6. (C) As requested reftel, prior to meeting with Niemtchinow, poloff contacted Paris-based Italian and Norwegian embassy representatives. While both embassies were aware of the SCC proposal, neither had received instructions from their capitals. Accordingly, poloff briefed them on the substance of our planned demarche.

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